DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 286 630 PS 016 833

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TITLE	Negotiation and Enactment in Social Pretend Play: Relations to Social Acceptance and Social Cognition.
SPONS AGENCY	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Ottawa (Ontario).
PUB DATE	13 Jun 87
NOTE	24p.; For related document, see ED 279 412.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Classroom Observation Techniques; Cognitive Ability; Hypothesis Testing; *Interpersonal Competence; Popularity; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education; *Pretend Play; Social Adjustment; *Social Cognition
IDENTIFIERS	*Metacommunication; *Negotiation Processes; Social Acceptance; Theory Development

ABSTRACT

Theoretical conceptions of the value of social pretend play in the socialization process have focused on two potentially different mediating factors: play enactment and negotiation of the rules for play. In this study, observational measures of enactment were distinguished from negotiation so as to examine their independent and joint relations to social adjustment, social acceptance, and social role-taking. Participants were 62 boys and girls who were observed during free play in their day care centers. Specifically examined were the differential relations of both explicit metacommunication about social pretend play and social pretend play enactments to social adjustment, social acceptance, and social cognition. Five measures of social competence were collected: a teacher rating of social adjustment, one teacher and two peer measures of popularity with peers, and a measure of social cognitive skill. Findings indicated that play enactment and negotiation of play were significant correlates of peer popularity as measured by peer likability ratings and by positive peer nominations. Pretend enactment accounted for more of the total variance than did negotiation. Enactment was significantly correlated with popularity independently of negotiation, but the reverse was not true. It is concluded that findings are consistent with traditional views emphasizing the functional significance of pretend transformations per se. (Author/RH)

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June 13, 1987.

ED286630

Negotiation and Enactment in Social Pretend Play:

Relations to Social Acceptance and Social Cognition

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Running Head: PLAY NEGOTIATION & ENACTMENT

This research was supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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Abstract

Pretend play with peers has been hypothesized to augment the social and social-cognitive skills of preschool children. Two alternative mechanisms for these effects have been proposed: first, out-of-play negotiations with play partners about roles, object properties and actions; and second, the actual enactment of pretend episodes. The frequency of negotiation and enactment was observed in 62 boys and girls during free play in their daycare centers. The relation of these pretend components to each other and to indices of social acceptance and social cognition were evaluated. Negotiation and enactment were positively correlated. In addition, they correlated with indices of peer popularity. Enactment was significantly correlated with popularity independent of negotiation, but the reverse was not true. These findings were interpreted as indicating that pretend enactment was an essential feature of the observed relations of social pretend play to social competence.

Pretend Play Negotiation and Enactment: Relations to Social Acceptance and Social Cognition

Engagement in social pretend play has been linked with the development of young children's social competencies (Garvey, 1977; Singer, 1973; Vygotsky, 1976). Experimental training studies have demonstrated that participation in pretend play can enhance children's role-taking skills (Fink, 1976; Saltz and Johnson, 1974), group cooperation (Rosen, 1974; Saltz, Dixon and Johnson, 1977; Smith and Syddall, 1978), and group participation (Smith, Dalgleish and Herzmark, 1981). Observational studies in naturalistic settings have established that the frequency with which a child engages in social pretend play is positively related to peer popularity and social role-taking ability (Connolly and Doyle, 1984; Rubin and Maioni, 1975).

Developmental theorists have suggested that the process of pretend enactment assists the child in forming conceptual distinctions between object and action, and between self and other (Mead, 1934; Vygotsky, 1976). It has also been argued that the enactment of pretend identities and everyday activities leads to the extraction of social rules and to the development of social role understanding (Fein, 1981; Garvey, 1977; Saltz and Johnson, 1974). In this framework, competency in social relations and maturity of social-cognitive skills results from the cognitive processes stimulated during the pretend play activity.

An alternative explanation for the relation between social pretend play and social competence has recently been suggested. Based on the work of Piaget (1962) pretend activity is hypothesized to contribute to social development by providing a context for peer negotiation and the resolution of conflict (Rubin,

1980; Rubin, Fein and Vandenberg, 1983). That is, through the active resolution of debates with play partners who hold conflicting ideas about the management of the pretend episode, accommodative social-cognitive growth may occur (Doise and Palmonari, 1984). In this view, the context for social negotiation provided by pretend play, rather than the play enactment, is facilitative of growth.

The distinction between play enactment or "text" and play management or "context" has been noted and examined in a few recent studies (Bateson, 1955; Fein, Moorin & Ensein, 1982; Goncu & Kessel, 1984). The term "metacommunication" is the term often used to indicate management messages that clarify how other verbalizations and behaviour should be interpreted, or establishes the appropriateness of behaviour in a particular play context (McLoyd, Thomas and Warren, 1984). Metacommunication may usefully be conceptualized along the dimension of embeddedness versus explicitness (Giffin, 1984). An embedded metacommunication is one which is implicit in the content of a given communication. It may be either verbal or non-verbal. For example, a child may say to his partner, "It's time to feed you, baby." In this case the discrepancy between the verbal content of the communication and the reality of the situation carries the implicit message. "Let's pretend." A child may also say, "Here's your food." In this case, the message "Let's pretend" is conveyed by the communication that would often be omitted in an actual feeding episode, but is still implicit in the enactment of the pretend scene. A child may also say to the play partner, "Let's pretend I was the mother and you were the baby." In this case the message, "Let's pretend", is explicit in that it occurs prior to, or is independent of, pretend enactment. Thus, explicit metacommunication refers to the negotiation of the plans and properties of pretend, outside the pretend play

itself.

Matthews (1977) has shown that social pretend play sequences typically contain several explicit play negotiations which break the "frame" of the pretend sequence and which must be resolved for play to continue. For example, two children engaged in domestic role play may stop their role and action sequence enactment when one child disagrees with another about the transformations of household objects, saying "That's not the stove, that's the bed!" During social pretend play 4-year-olds were found to spend 18% of the time in social pretend interrupting the pretend sequence to discuss role attributions, object identities, action sequences and other play details.

Sachs, Goldman, Chaille and Sewald (1980) examined the pretend play management and role enactment of preschool children playing in dyads. Classifying the children's utterances on a five-point scale ranging from clearly management to clearly enactment, they found that over 50% of the childrens' utterances were devoted to the implicit or explicit planning and management of pretend functions. Management included role assignment, description of the child's own action, directives to the other child, and statements about the activities. It was usually indicated by the child speaking in a normal as opposed to altered voice, e.g., "Let's pretend that ..". Fewer than 25% of the utterances were clearly identifiable as play enactments, typically indicated by a voice change, or gestural acknowledgement of the pretend transformation, e.g., "I shot a big lion". The frequencies of the two types of utterances were not significantly correlated (Sachs, personal communication, April, 1981). McLoyd (McLoyd, Warren & Thomas, 1984; McLoyd, Thomas & Warren, 1984) observed that metacommunication was more frequent in older preschoolers and when roles more

remote from reality were being enacted.

In the above studies developmental changes in the relative frequency of metacommunicative utterances about play, and their role in maintaining the play have been examined. An examination of the relations of these utterances to play enactment, and of both metacommunication and enactment to social competence is warranted. Understanding the relation between these phenomena in their natural milieu is necessary prior to any experimental study of their functional significance. In this study, the differential relations of negotiation, i.e., explicit metacommunication about social pretend play, and social pretend play enactment to social adjustment, social acceptance and social cognition were examined. On the basis of the literature it was predicted that pretend negotiation and enactment would be relatively independent, and that one or both would be significantly related to indices of social competence.

Method

Subjects and Settings:

Sixty-two 4 and 5 year-old English speaking children, 30 boys and 32 girls, from three day-care centers (n's=21, 22 and 19) located in urban residential areas of Montreal participated. The mean age was 57 mo. (s.d. 6.3) in Center 1, 58 mo. (s.d. 4.3) in Center 2, and 61 mo. (s.d. 4.9) in Center 3. The children were from middle- and lower-middle class homes (Blishen and McRoberts, 1976). Written parental permission for participation in the study was obtained; acceptance rate was 80%, refusal rate 5% and failure to respond 15%.

All three centers served 40 to 60 children between the ages of 2 and 6 years, and attempted to provide quality daycare with a balanced focus on social

and cognitive development. In Center 1 the children were in a single-mixed age group of 40-50 children in a large divided play area. In Centers 2 and 3 children were grouped by age in separate classrooms. Effective teacher-child ratio was 1:10 in each center.

Measures and Procedure:

Pretend Play Observations: The frequencies of negotiation and enactment of social pretend play were recorded during the morning indoor free play period by trained observers using a 20-second observation interval followed by a 20-second recording interval. Children were observed in rotation, each for two sequential 20-second observation intervals at a time, for a total of 52 intervals per child. These observations were made twice weekly for approximately one month.

Negotiation and enactment of pretend play were assessed by recording their occurrence every five seconds during each 20-second observation interval. Negotiation was scored when the child engaged in preparatory or procedural behaviors related to social pretend play with a peer, explicitly mentioning a pretend transformation or negating it, but not taking on a role or actually transforming an object. Preparatory or procedural behaviors were concerned with the nature of the pretend sequence, and included invitations to engage in social pretend play (e.g. "Let's play spaceship"), clarification of rights and object properties (e.g. "You have to sit there", "That's a ray gun"), and discussion of roles (e.g. "The captain holds the wheel"), carried out in the child's natural voice. Pretend enactment was scored when the child indicated his/her engagement in social pretend play by tone of voice (e.g. change in pitch), content of speech (e.g. "I shot a big lion"), physical gesture (e.g. waving), stance (e.g. angry),

or actions (e.g. shooting). Enactment was therefore scored during ongoing pretend play dialogue or during transformations and animations of toys and other objects.

To distinguish social pretend play from other activities, the 20-second recording interval was used to classify the preceding 20-seconds as social pretend play, non-pretend social interaction or solitary activity. Social interaction was scored if the interval contained a social initiation which was responded to within 10 seconds. That is, if one child successfully engaged another in social interaction by gesture; deliberate contact; verbal directive or request; imitation; or active, directed smiling or laughing, the interval was scored as social. Otherwise, the interval was scored as non-social. The observer then scored the social interaction interval as pretend if it consisted predominantly of negotiation or enactment activity, and as non-pretend if it consisted predominantly of activities in which objects and people were treated according to common and appropriate use.

Observations were carried out by five trained observers working in rotating pairs. Inter-observer reliability between pairs of observers simultaneously watching the same child was collected for 20% of the observations. Kappa reliability coefficients (Cohen, 1960) were .76 for negotiation, .85 for enactment, .92 for social pretend play, and .93 for non-pretend social activity.

Social Competence Measures: Five measures of social competence were collected: a teacher rating of social adjustment, one teacher and two peer measures of peer popularity, and a measure of social cognitive skill.

Teachers in each center rated the children's social adjustment on the Kohn Social Competence Scale (Kohn & Rosman, 1972), a 73-item rating scale for

children in full-day care yielding two scores: a measure of Interest-Participation in classroom activities with peers (KRI) and a measure of Co-operation-compliance with the classroom routine (KRII). Only the first measure (KRI) was used as a measure of social competence with peers. To make the task of rating easier for the teachers, a procedural alteration was introduced whereby teachers rated all children on a single question at a time rather than all questions for each child at a time. In addition, teachers rank-ordered the children in their class on peer popularity (TPOP, Connolly and Doyle, 1981). The median correlation between popularity ranking by the head teacher and the assistant teacher in the three centers was .89.

In addition to the teacher ratings of popularity, peer acceptance was also assessed using a positive peer nomination procedure (NPOP) and a likability rating measure (RPOP). Peer nominations were solicited from each child using a picture sociometric procedure in which the child was asked to nominate five classmates with whom s/he would like to play a "special game at school". Sequential nominations were obtained by saying "If (child nominated) weren't here today, then whom would you like to play with?" Numbers of nominations received were expressed as standard scores within each class. Because the reliability of peer-nomination measures with preschoolers has been questioned (Hymel, 1983), test-retest reliability (Pearson r) was assessed in two centers over a six-week period. Pearson r's averaged .45. The likability ratings were collected using the roster-and-rating procedure (Asher, Singleton, Tinsley and Hymel, 1979). Each child was asked to rate all his/her classmates in terms of liking to play with them "a lot", "a little" or "not at all". Because high inter-judge and/or test-retest reliability has been reported for KRI and TPOP (Connolly and Doyle,

1981) and the sociometric rating scale (Asher et al, 1979), reliability was not reassessed in the present study.

In the affective role-taking test (AFFRT), the child was shown five pictorially illustrated stories, asked to take the role of a same-sex child in each story, and asked to identify and justify the feelings of the two illustrated characters, for a maximum of 4 points per story. The story themes were those used by Urberg and Docherty (1976) to tap simultaneous role-taking (e.g having one's candy eaten by another child, losing a game, approaching a dog who has just growled).

Peabody IQ was assessed as a measure of intellectual maturity. All of the child measures were obtained in an individual interview by assistants who were unaware of the hypotheses of the study.

RESULTS

Enactment of social pretend play was observed on average for 42.8 (s.d. = 22.3) out of 208 five-second intervals, or 3.41 minutes per child. Pretend play negotiation was observed on average for 9.9 (s.d. = 7.0) out of 208 five-second intervals, or 0.82 minutes per child. Because pretend play was low in frequency, the representativeness of these measures of the children's behaviour, in terms of internal consistency over the one month interval, was assessed via Cronbach's alpha co-efficient (Cronbach, 1951). Computed within each center across the 26 sets of two sequential 20-second observation intervals, alpha ranged from .34 to .73, with a median value of .66 for enactment and .59 for negotiation. Thus, negotiation and enactment were of comparable and adequate reliability for further analysis.

Preliminary analyses of variance of center and sex effects indicated that centers differed significantly in age, negotiation, enactment, teacher-rated Interest-Participation (KRI), teacher popularity rankings (TPOP), affective role-taking (AFFRT) and frequency of non-pretend social activity. Since, as shown in Table 1, these differences showed no consistent pattern, further analyses were conducted for the total sample using scores that were standardized within center. Sex differences were found only in peer ratings of popularity (RPOP), where girls were rated significantly more favorably than boys, means 1.14 vs. .98 respectively. There were no significant sex X center interactions.

Insert Table 1

Before the relations of the social pretend play measures to the five social competence measures were examined, the correlations between the five competence measures were examined to assess the feasibility of using aggregate measures of social competence. Aggregate measures were sought in order to strengthen the generalizability of findings and to reduce the number of measures of social competence (Nunnally, 1967; Rushton, Brainerd and Pressley, 1980; Moskowitz & Schwarz, 1982). These correlations are presented in Table 2. Two aggregate scores were computed by summing the standardized scores of the most strongly associated variables: a teacher-based measure of social adjustment (KRI+TPOP), and a peer-based measure of social acceptance (NPOP+RPOP). Role-taking (AFFRT) was not aggregated with other variables. There were no significant sex differences on the aggregate scores.

Insert Table 2

Pearson correlations were then computed between the three resulting social competence measures and the social pretend play measures. Pretend negotiation and enactment both correlated positively with aggregate peer social acceptance (NPOP+RPOP), $\underline{r}$ (60)=.27, $p<.05$ and $r(60)=.39$, $p<.01$, for negotiation and enactment respectively. Correlations with the aggregate teacher measure of competence (KRI+TPOP) and with affective role-taking (AFFRT) were non-significant, r's<.10. Thus, the pretend play measures were both associated with greater popularity with peers as measured by peer sociometric instruments, but not by the teacher-based measures.

The correlations of age, IQ, and non-pretend social activity with the pretend component and the social competence measures were examined as possible mediators of the above relationships. While IQ was positively correlated with the measures of social competence, with r's(58) ranging from .26, $p<.05$ with AFFRT to .30, $p<.05$ with aggregate teacher-based competence ratings (KRI + POP), neither IQ nor age were correlated significantly with the pretend play measures, r's <. The frequency of non-pretend social interaction was correlated significantly with both aggregate teacher-based competence and pretend enactment, r's(60)=.32 and -.30, $p<.025$. Controlling for frequency of non-pretend social interaction increased only slightly, however, the relationships between the pretend measures and the social competence measures. Pretend negotiation and enactment still correlated significantly only with aggregate peer-derived social competence, partial r's(59)=.31, $p<.025$ and .45, $p<.001$ respectively. Thus, the

obtained results are not affected by their relations to third variables such as age, IQ and social activity level, which are importance sources of variation in the behaviour and adjustment ratings of preschoolers.

Pretend negotiation and enactment were, however, significantly correlated, $r(60)=.60$ $p<.001$. To evaluate whether these pretend components made independent contributions to the prediction of aggregate peer popularity (NPOP+RPOP), partial correlation analyses were conducted between each pretend play component and aggregate peer popularity, while holding the other pretend component constant. The relation of enactment to NPOP+RPOP was significant when negotiation was held constant, partial $r(59)=.29, p<.025$, but the relation of negotiation was nonsignificant when enactment was held constant, partial $r(59)=.05$, n.s. Thus, the frequency of pretend enactment but not pretend negotiation was associated with peer-derived measures of popularity independent of the association of the other pretend variable.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical conceptions of the value of social pretend play in the socialization process have focussed on two potentially different mediating factors, play enactment and negotiation of the rules for such play. In this study, observational measures of enactment were distinguished from negotiation so as to examine their independent and joint relations to social adjustment, social acceptance and social role-taking. By so doing, we endeavored to clarify the often-reported relations between social pretend play and social competencies. The results indicate that play enactment and negotiation of play are significant correlates of peer popularity as measured by peer likability ratings and by

positive peer nominations.

It has been suggested that pretend transformations lead to the learning of social-cognitive reversibility (Rubin et al., 1983). However, in this study no evidence of a relationship between the pretend measures and the measures of social-cognitive processing was obtained. The extant literature has been equivocal in documenting consistent relations between time spent in social pretend play and social cognition. The present findings are consistent with other studies which have failed to find a relation (e.g. Brainerd, 1982; Saltz et al., 1977). Connolly and Doyle (1984), using measures similar to those employed in the current study found complexity but not amount of social pretend play to be related to affective role-taking. Unfortunately, measures of complexity of social pretend play were not examined in the current study. Rubin and Pepler (1980) have suggested that the use of an observational methodology to assess behavioral demonstrations of social cognitive skill might reveal a more consistent relationship with social pretend play. Alternatively, the failure to find consistent relations across studies between social pretend play and social cognition may indicate that social cognitive skills do not mediate the relation between social pretend play and social and cognitive competencies.

The failure to replicate previous findings of a relation between the pretend measures and teacher measures of adjustment and popularity (Connolly & Doyle, 1984) was initially surprising. Further examination of the Kohn and Rosman teacher rating scale clarified the situation somewhat. It appears that the procedural change to a question-by-question format as opposed to child-by-child format greatly altered the nature of the scores obtained. That is, in the current study there was no association between the two scale-scores, KRI and

KRII, $r(60)=.09$, ns., whereas with the original procedure, the correlation was substantial, $r(89)=.62$, $p<.01$ (Connolly and Doyle, 1984). Further evidence that the failure to replicate may have been due to the changes in the KRI measure came from an examination of the relations between the pretend measures and the two teacher-based measures of competence before aggregation. Whereas the pretend measures were uncorrelated with KRI, both pretend measures were correlated with teacher-based popularity (TPOP) when, as in Connolly and Doyle (1984), non-pretend social activity was partialled out, $r's(58)=.30$ and .31, $p<.025$. Therefore, the present results are substantively consistent with previous results with similar measures, and substantiate a relation between social pretend play and indices of social competence.

A major purpose of this study was to compare the relative importance of negotiation and enactment of pretend in relation to social competencies. In this study negotiation occupied 19% of the time spent preparing for or engaging in social pretend play. This rate is almost identical to that found by Matthews (1977), but much less that the 50% reported by Sachs et. al. (1980). The discrepancy may lie in the definition of negotiation. Sachs et al. coded utterances on a 5-point continuum ranging from "clearly expressing enactment" to "clearly expressing management". In Matthews (1977) and in the current study, negotiation was defined as explicit discussion of pretend plans, acts and/or transformations that were clearly outside of the pretend "frame". Thus, Sachs et al. included both utterances classified as completely aimed at management and those primarily aimed at management but partially enactment, whereas in the current study a more restrictive definition of negotiation was used.

Another discrepancy between the findings of the current study and Sachs et

al (1980), lies in the observed relation between frequency of enactment and frequency of negotiation. In Sachs et al (1980), the frequency of the two types of utterances were uncorrelated. In contrast in the present study the correlation between frequencies of negotiation and enactment was substantial. Methodological variations, such the definitions of the measures, may account for these different findings. That is, Sachs et al (1980) coded utterances as either enactment or management. In the current study, both enactment and negotiation could occur in the same 5-second interval.

Nevertheless, the correlation between the two pretend measures in the present study suggests that their separation into exclusive categories may be ecologically artificial. As defined in the coding schemes of Sachs et al (1980) and Giffin (1984), negotiation is one end of a continuum from implicit to explicit metacommunication about social pretend play, which often is being enacted simultaneously. From these data, it appears that children who are socially adept engage in both play negotiation and play enactment. In keeping with Bateson (1955), negotiations may permit the enactment of pretend to continue longer, especially in mature preschoolers whose pretend is more ideational and thus, whose meaning is less clear from the objects employed (Cole and Lavoie, 1985; Matthews, 1977). An important factor may be the flexibility to shift easily from one mode to the other rather than the ability to engage in either negotiation or enactment per se.

Though both negotiation and enactment were positively related to peer-derived sociometric measures, a consideration of the relative contributions of the two pretend components to social functioning indicated that pretend enactment accounted for more of the total variance than did negotiation, despite equal

reliability of measurement. Moreover, enactment made a contribution independent of negotiation but the reverse was not true. From a theoretical perspective, these results are consistent with traditional views of social pretend play which emphasize the functional significance of the pretend transformations per se (Garvey, 1977; Smilansky, 1968; Singer and Singer 1978). The alternative explanation focussing on the role of the peer interaction context is less well supported by these data. While negotiation was related to peer acceptance, this relationship was not independent of its correlation with play enactment. We may speculate most parsimoniously that children like peers who engage in pretend because these peers provide enjoyable collaborative play experiences. The assessment of such a speculation would necessitate the design of a training study which separately manipulates the two processes. The current study suggests, however, that such separation may be difficult if not impossible to accomplish.

In summary, the results of this study provide some preliminary support for the importance of distinguishing between pretend enactment and negotiation in examining the contributions of social pretend play to social adjustment. Although the two components were correlated, play enactment was related to peer popularity independent of pretend negotiation.

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Table 1

Differences Between Centers in Pretend Play Behaviour, Social Competence Indices, and Control Variables

Measure		Center 1	Center 2	Center 3	F(1,56)
Age	X	56.6^{a}	$58.^{a,b}$	61.1^{b}	3.84*
	(s.d.)	(6.3)	(4.3)	(4.9)	
NEGOTIATION	X	6.35^{a}	13.52^{b}	$9.34,^{b}$	5.30**
	(s.d.)	(3.8)	(9.2)	(6.0)	
ENACTMENT	X	28.0^{a}	53.2^{b}	$41.2^{a,b}$	7.4***
	(s.d.)	(13.8)	(26.2)	(18.6)	
KR1	X	71.8^{a}	96^{b}	27.4^{c}	58.4***
	(s.d.)	(10.9)	(22.6)	(24.8)	
TPOP	X	.39	.45	.58	3.07*
	(s.d.)	(.26)	(.29)	(.25)	
NPOP	X	.16	.16	.16	.00
	(s.d.)	(.07)	(.14)	(.06)	
RPOP	X	1.11	1.07	.98	1.50
	(s.d.)	(.23)	(.36)	(.30)	
COGRT	X	9.58	9.53	9.11	.92
	(s.d.)	(.90)	(1.02)	(1.24)	
AFFRT	X	12.24^{a}	15.84^{b}	$14.5^{a,b}$	3.64*
	(s.d.)	(5.4)	(3.1)	(4.3)	
PEABODY IQ	X	95.9	97.5	96.8	.05
	(s.d.)	(12.1)	(14.7)	(20.3)	
NON PRETEND INTERACTIONS	X (s.d.)	24.2^{a} (5.9)	13.8^{b} (5.2)	22.8^{a} (7.4)	21.7***

[a]KRI - Kohn Social Competence Scale: Factor I; TPOP-teacher-ranked peer social acceptance; NPOP-social acceptance by peers-nominations; RPOP-social acceptance by peers - rating; COGRT-cognitive role-taking; AFFRT-affective role-taking.

[a,b,c] Means with different superscripts differ significantly according to Turkey's test with = .05

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Table 2

Intercorrelations of Social Competence Measures

	TROP	*NPOP	*RPOP	AFFRT
KR1[a]	.59***	.26*	.30*	.24*
TPOP		.47***	.43***	.18
*NPOP			.47***	-.01
*RPOP				.01

[a]KRI - Kohn Social Competence Scale: Factor I; TPOP-teacher-ranked peer social acceptance; NPOP-social acceptance by peers-nominations; RPOP-social acceptance by peers-rating; AFFRT-affective role-taking,

df=60.
p<.05*
p<.01**
p<.001***